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Review Paper

Strategic Narratives and Power in the Modern Middle East

An Interdisciplinary communication and review- essay

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INTRODUCTION: Recent scholarship portrays the Middle East as a region where classic power politics intersects with digital vulnerabilities and cultural narratives. U.S. influence still matters, but it increasingly competes with assertive regional actors and external powers. At the same time, soft power and storytelling—expressed through literature and think tank discourse—shape how societies understand sovereignty, legitimacy and cooperation. This shorter review synthesises insights on geopolitics, digital governance and cultural diplomacy, including findings from a recent study on the trilogy The Adventures of Two Captains; the contents analyzed here are not the authors' main perception but rather a review of the previously published works and does not reflect authors stands at all.

Keywords: *complexity, free study, literature review, Middle East, MENA, Peace, Political Rivalry*

Shifting Power and Multipolar Competition

Analysts argue that the United States can no longer dictate outcomes in the Middle East. Chinese foreign policy illustrates this shift: infrastructure investment through the Belt

and Road Initiative and trade agreements such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership seek to rewrite regional supply chains while maintaining political autonomy through technological self-reliance and selective openness. This state centered model, though generating debt risks for partners, offers an alternative to Western liberalization and encourages Gulf monarchies and Iran to hedge between multiple patrons. In Washington, some experts suggest that framing the region as a battleground with China misreads its limited strategic value and urge a reduction in U.S. commitments.

The 2025 Israel–Iran war exemplifies this multipolar reality. Beijing's efforts to retain energy ties with Iran and commercial links with Israel faltered as the conflict escalated; criticism of Israel's actions aligned China with the Global South while exposing the fragility of its economic relationships. The United States, meanwhile, reaffirmed security guarantees to Israel, highlighting divergent norms among great powers. Regional powers also adapt: Gulf monarchies pursue diversification plans like Saudi Vision 2030 and the UAE's post oil economy, while Iran uses proxies to deter adversaries and project influence. Such asymmetrical strategies—supporting non state actors in Lebanon, Iraq, Syria and Yemen—provide strategic depth but also contribute to regional instability and cycles of sanctions and counter sanctions.

Soft Power, Literature and the Contest of Narratives

Hard power is only part of the story. Language and literature are recognized as strategic assets that construct political realities and transmit values across borders. A qualitative study of The Adventures of Two Captains trilogy illustrates how fiction can illuminate international relations. This science fiction epic blends poetic storytelling with political allegory: characters journey from a quest for knowledge to a struggle against fear and ignorance, using persuasion and dialogue rather than forcing them to reshape society. The authors analyze how the narrative embodies themes of legitimacy (compassion and knowledge versus fear), cooperation versus competition (alliances across civilizations versus monopolistic power) and identity ("othering" replaced by empathy as rebels are understood rather than destroyed).

The two protagonists offer archetypes for diplomacy. Captain Orion represents formal, hierarchical statecraft, whereas Captain "A" embodies flexible, cultural diplomacy that engages with diverse communities. Their synergy suggests that effective global governance requires both traditional institutions and informal networks. This literary analysis underscores how soft power—through storytelling, symbolism and discourse—contributes to public diplomacy and reshapes political imagination. It complements research on think tanks, which shows that policy entrepreneurs frame economic and digital risks through different lenses: some emphasize market solutions and contractual transparency, while others foreground national security and state intervention. Together, literature and policy discourse reveal how ideas travel, create norms and influence decision making.

Digital Governance and Security as a Strategic Frontier

Cyberspace has become a key battleground. The Persian Gulf and North Africa face high rates of phishing, denial of service attacks, zero-day exploits and other intrusions, prompting governments to establish national cybersecurity programs. The 2011 Arab uprisings and the Stuxnet virus highlighted the political consequences of digital tools and sabotage, leading Iran to develop sophisticated offensive capabilities and Gulf states to cooperate with the United States and the United Kingdom on defense. This landscape has spurred interest in cyber insurance and regulation. Research on British think tanks shows how organizations such as Chatham House and the Royal United Services Institute advocate different approaches: one stresses market-based risk sharing, the other emphasizes state backed guarantees and mandatory standards. Although markets for cyber insurance in the Middle East are nascent, they illustrate the intersection of legal frameworks, economic incentives and geopolitical considerations in shaping digital norms.

Conclusion

The Middle East's future will be shaped by more than military might. Power is diffusing across states and non-state actors, and great power competition is tempered by local agency and economic diversification. At the same time, cultural narratives and policy discourses influence how societies imagine alternatives and negotiate

their place in the world. Understanding the region therefore requires attention to both geopolitics and soft power: the interplay of infrastructure and ideas, proxies and poems, digital regulation and cultural diplomacy. Scholars and practitioners alike can benefit from examining how strategic narratives—whether in political treatises or science fiction epics—contribute to a deeper and more nuanced comprehension of international relations; such communications' essays and other related literatures help us better navigate the complicated problems like Iran-U. S negotiations and the broader peace problems in the region from different factors.

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